

RMC Legislative Committee
July 7, 2016
12pm-2pm
Wye Research and Education Center, Queenstown, MD
Meeting Minutes

Participants:

Josh Hastings, Chair

Sarah Visintainer

Angela Visintainer

Melissa Einhorn

Michael Pennington

Doris Mason

Kelly Dudeck

Paige Tilghman

Senator Addie Eckardt

Erroll Mattox

Nancy Nunn

Scott Warner

Elizabeth Paul

RMC Staff:

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

Meredith Donaho, Program Administrator

*Minutes not yet approved by Legislative Committee.

The meeting was called to order at approximately 12:25pm.

Updates & Introductions

First item, Chair Josh Hastings led introductions and updates. First update, the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy 17th Annual Conference will be November 10th; the topic of the conference will be food systems and invites will be available soon. Second update, Senator Eckardt introduced her intern, Melissa Einhorn, who will be assisting this summer with creating an inventory of food pantries on the Eastern Shore, as well as a variation of veteran services available in the region. Third, Nancy Nunn announced the report, The Future of Farming, will be released soon; in addition, in regards to watershed efforts, WHIP workshops will be available early September/October and will take place on the lower and upper shore region.

Fourth, Kelly Dudeck announced Grow & Fortify will be creating a new nonprofit organization called Grow Maryland, whose mission will be to focus on value-added foods and agri-tourism in the State. Grow & Fortify will also be working on a documentary series to appear on Maryland Public Television focused on craft beers, spirits, wine and food. Grow & Fortify will be co-hosting a mini-conference with the Rural Maryland Council in December, more information will be available soon.

The Rural Maryland Council announced MAERDAF application grants are due July 15th, RMPHF grant applications are due August 15th. The Council will also be co-hosting a webinar to share information about requirements and eligibility for RMPHF on July 26th, and co-hosting a screening of the film "Farmland" on July 21st at the Carroll County Public Library- Mt. Airy Branch.

Paige Tilghman of Talbot County Economic Development announced that the organization will be meeting with the Secretary of Economic Development and will focus this coming legislative session on tier-designation job creation incentives for the counties. Scott Warner, Mid-Shore Regional Council, provided updates on the Regional Council's work with the Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center to promote F3 Tech in schools (Fish, Farm and Food industries).

Sarah Visintainer shared Caroline County will be hiring a new Health Officer and will be setting a date to meet with the Maryland Delegation in the fall to focus on promoting tourism and securing funding for tourism marketing. Angela Visintainer, Caroline Economic Development Corporation, announced the Rural Counties Coalition will be partnering with the Rural Maryland Council to advocate for rural economic development incentives for the 2017 Legislative Session, including promoting manufacturing programs in local rural high schools.

Elizabeth Paul, representing Senator Mikulski's office, shared that Senator Mikulski's Salisbury office is now closed.

Mike Pennington announced the Tri-County Council of the Lower Shore helped to fund a recently released Shore Craft Beer app for iPhones to help locate craft beer on the lower shore. There will also be additional tour opportunities at local breweries in Salisbury coming soon.

Erroll Mattox shared the University of Maryland Eastern Shore will be offering a small farm outreach bus tour, to include tour stops in Virginia and Maryland. The tour will provide an opportunity for farmers to learn about value-added agriculture by visiting successful farms and learn techniques in direct marketing, agri-tourism, specialty crops, and more. Registration is open until August 3rd.

Doris Mason shared the Upper Shore Regional Council has expanded its Harvest Directory to include mid-shore counties and now includes a total of 500 agri-businesses. The printed directory will be made available in August. In addition, the Kent County Fiber Network is a project that will allow high speed internet across the county, and has broken ground, more information can be obtained at <http://fiber.kentcounty.com/>.

April 18, 2016 Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes from the April 18, 2016 Legislative Committee meeting were reviewed. No comments or suggestions were offered; the minutes were accepted unanimously.

Legislative Review

Charlotte Davis provided a review of the handout provided titled *2016 Session Review: Presentation to the Western Maryland Delegation Maryland General Assembly*. The highlights of the presentation included the budget summary and outlook, specifically the projected deficit for 2021, to be useful as a precursor for items of importance for the 2017 Legislative Session.

The Earned Income Tax Credit was also discussed, it is anticipated that this will be a major issue again for the 2017 Legislative Session. There was discussion that most individuals do not know they are eligible for the EITC tax credit; it was discussed the RMC Legislative Committee could reflect on ways to actively promote the tax credit to increase awareness. The EITC infographic provided by the Maryland Cash Campaign was also shared.

Rural manufacturing will be an important topic for the 2017 Legislative Session. Job creation based on the current tier-designation for counties, which accounts for creating 10 jobs, loses a lot of potential to create capacity building in rural areas. It was also discussed the possibility of working on a Rural Angel Investment program or tax credit to incentivize private support for business and communities.

The availability of marketing resources for tourism development was also cited as a concern, including the idea of soliciting for funds for each county to promote regional marketing efforts; \$5,000-\$10,000 of funds could be provided by the State to counties to spur tourism and economic growth. Counties could compete for the funding based on performance measures and assessments.

Renewable Energy Sprawl

Chair Josh Hastings discussed the impact renewable energy sprawl in rural areas, such as the Mills Branch Wind Energy Project. There is a concern that energy initiatives are taking land away from agriculture use and are not currently being used as a source to generate property tax revenue. Several other questions arose during the discussion, including:

- As technology changes rapidly, how do abandoned energy initiatives get addressed?
- Where is the future of energy generation going?
- How much can rural areas afford to use land for energy initiatives?

It was suggested that in going forward, there needs to be an effort to engage residents in the counties in regards to renewable energy projects. It was also discussed that renewable energy policies and models in other states should be looked at for potential models that can be mimicked in Maryland. Erroll Mattox volunteered to research renewable energy models in Vermont.

Other Issues

- Senator Edwards SB263 Payment In-Lieu of Taxes: the bill, or similar legislation, may be back in the next Legislative Session; work will need to focus on finding a good way to come up with an explanation for value with a dollar figure. The source of payment will be taken from General Funds, and the counties eligible will be Garrett, Allegany, Dorchester and Somerset.
- Sprinkler Tax Credit: an individual tax credit for sprinkler systems could be offered to offset the costs to stimulate homeownership.
- Video Lottery Terminals (VOLT): Charlotte Davis is assisting the MD State Fair Board to secure funding from gaming revenue; legislation could include expanding casinos to include Rocky Gap, Golden Gaming, and Ocean Downs to purchase their own machines to increase pay-back.
- Dairy/Nutrient Management Workshops: the year is projected to be difficult for dairy farmers, many dairy farmers may quit due to nutrient management regulations that will restrict their selling or moving excess fertilizer off of their farms; workshops addressing the regulations and information for dairy farmers will be provided by the Maryland Department of Agriculture in Garrett, Washington and Cecil Counties July 11th-14th.
- Maryland Association of Counties Conference will be August 17th-20th in Ocean City.

No other issues or business was discussed.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:05 pm.

Next meeting: Monday, September 19, 2016, 1pm-2pm, Location TBD